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Gaṅgā Devī with Pūrṇa Ghaṭa

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Editor : Dr. V. S. Agrawala

PŪRṆA KALĀŚA¹
OR
THE VASE OF PLENTY

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THE PŪRṆA KALĀŚA

Pūrṇa-Ghaṭa, the Full Vase, is one of the most typical and perfect symbols of Indian art and mythology. Its names in Indian literature,

Pūrṇa-Ghaṭa according to the rich expressiveness of Sanskrit language, are Pūrṇa-Kalāśa, Pūrṇa-Ghaṭa, Pūrṇa-Kumbha, Maṅgala Kalāśa, Bhadra Ghaṭa,

Chandana Kalāśa, etc.¹ The symbol has at its back a long and hoary tradition in literature, art and real life.²

Its ritual value is so deep-rooted and ubiquitous even to this day that no religious ceremony can be performed without the installation of the Auspicious Pot. Right from the earliest times onwards it has stood through the ages in Indian civilisation as a visible symbol of the most mysterious life-forces revealed as creation, and as a popular decorative motif of beauty and auspiciousness. It has represented from

the time immemorial the plentiful effusion of nature's blessings bestowed upon man. Its form in art and ritual is the richly decorated pitcher full with water and overflowing with bunches of lotus buds, flowers and leaves. Green foliage vegetating from its mouth make it look extremely charming.

As the highest symbol of plenitude the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa stands to be unique, used freely, though meaningfully, throughout the history of Indian art from the Śuṅga period onwards when stone and other permanent material began to be used widely for architecture and art. It

is accepted not exclusively by one creed, but is common to all religions taking birth and flourishing on Indian soil. It is "employed equally by all sects and occurs not only in India proper, but also in Farther India and Indonesia."³ It was received as a token of auspicious beauty and welfare from India in the countries coming at one time within the orbit of her cultural expansion, and spread all over Asia and islands where influences of Indian culture were deeply felt.

It is (1) auspicious and apotropaic, (2) embellishing and complementary, as well as (3) indicative and symbolical. "It is the emblem *par excellence* of fulness, and prosperity, of life endowed with all gifts, moral, material and spiritual. The full

Its extension
in time
and space

Indian art from the Śuṅga period
onwards when stone and other
permanent material began to be used
widely for architecture and art. It

o/

Its threefold
aspect

excellence of fulness, and prosperity,
of life endowed with all gifts, moral,
material and spiritual. The full

blooming overflowing contents of life are comparable to the plants and foliage luxuriating from the mouth of a jar filled with the life-giving liquid.”⁴

I

The conception of the Pūrṇa Kalaśa was already widely known and popular as early as the *Rigveda* and references to it are numerous in Vedic literature. The *Rigveda*, III. 32.15, tells of the Overflowing Pitcher, *Ā-Pūrṇa Kalaśa*, installed as ‘the emblem of divine bounty held at the disposal of the Yajamāna and symbolising an alround plenitude of possessions.’

Y / Potions of the overflowing contents of the Vessel of Plenty are wished for all those present. As it reads out :

Overflowing is the vase of this man here (i.e. Yajamāna of the sacrifice). Glory to him.

As a bounteous pourer have I filled up the cup (*kośa*) for you all to drink.⁵

In RV. IX. 106.7, it is described as, “the abiding place of Soma full with meath.”

Here, in the context, it is really the Jar of Soma. The whole Ninth Book of the *Rigveda* is devoted to the glorification of Soma, the Life-elixir. We know from many a passage in the *Rigveda* and elsewhere that an elaborate process was followed in preparing the

Soma-juice⁶, and a Kalaśa⁷ is invariably mentioned in connection with pressing and collecting of Soma in it. The jar into which Soma-sap rushes for storage, is called Somadhāna, Soma-receptacle (VI. 69.6; IX. 97.33)⁸, and described as white, filled with milk and the shinning liquid⁹. "The foaming or the overflowing of the jar is hinted at here by the R̥gvedic word, *āpipyāna*, i.e. streaming forth its contents."¹⁰

In the ritual language, a Soma-bowl was named *Dhishana*¹¹, a word which at the same time denotes Wish or Wish-Goddess ; also according to Ludwig and Johanssen¹², a Goddess of Prosperity and Abundance. This makes, however, further clear that how the R̥gvedic seers were fully familiar with the symbolism of a (*Soma*—) pitcher which was taken to be both a symbol of plenty and representing the Goddess of Plenty conceived in it and bearing the same name. Cf. Śrī-Lakṣmī and her affiliations with the Full Ewer, see pp. 9-14.

The auspicious and beautifying nature of Soma itself is emphasised in clear words :

The Soma drops bring up all felicities. (1)

Dispelling manifold mishap, giving the courser's progeny,

Yea, and the warrior steed, success. (2)

Queller of curses, mighty, with strong sway, this
Pavamāna shall

Bring treasures to the worshipper. (11)

As it is effused and poured in the Jar,

Bestows all glories everywhere. (19)¹³

No doubt, Bounty and Beauty reside in it. Thus, it becomes an auspicious jar, Bhadra Kalāśa, and is invoked for manifold blessings and auspicious enjoyment :

etāni bhadrā Kalāśa kriyāma. (RV. X. 32.9)¹⁴

The idea of plentifulness which man aspires for projected itself in this fine emblem of pot overflowing with foliage. To a person desirous of blessings it represented a cross-section of the mythical land of exuberance, the Elysian Paradise, for which he longs and strives with all perseverance. As it could be a message of life and prosperity for one, so also for all. In words of Coomaraswamy : "The vase of plenty... is clearly a life symbol, and the formal offering of such a vase can only be the expression of a wish that the recipient, or in general, all those present, may enjoy health, wealth and long life. The representation in art implies similarly a desired instigation by suggestion of all the vegetative energies involved in the current conceptions of well-being ; as a symbol it clearly belongs to the order of ideas characteristic of the ancient life-cults of fertility and fruitfulness."¹⁵

As such it is described in the *Yajurveda*¹⁶. "The poet conceives that there is the Kumbha or the Full

Yajurveda Vase enshrined in the innermost secret of the womb which contains the infant, and this vase is said to be the real progenitor by the force of its inherent mysterious powers."¹⁷

The *Atharvaveda* makes us familiar with the name *Pūrṇa Kumbha*¹⁸, and expands its Atharvaveda symbology still further. The following passage presents before us the high imagery of the Pūrṇa Kumbha pulsating with buoyant life and vegetating in multifarious forms :

The Pūrṇa Kumbha is laid on Time. We behold it manifesting in various forms.

He who carries back all these worlds, is Time in the loftiest heaven.¹⁹

How is the space filled by luxuriance of life which comes out from unknown source ? The Full Vase reflects in attractive fashion the transmutation of non-existence into this visible creation—which itself is a sample of the manifest Plenum. But its fulness is derived from time, the Endless and Inexhaustible Flux and which forms the firm substratum of the cosmos. It is the womb which conceals within it the mystery of the birth of the cosmos.

The seer has here explained, as Dr. Agrawala says, "that an overflowing Pūrṇa Kumbha exists in the womb of Time and presides over the endless manifestations

of the eternal and powerful time process That which is in the womb of the Vase is one, invisible and individual. When it becomes 'many' (*bahudhā*, as said in the original) it manifests out and appears at its mouth. The branches and leaves on the top of the Full Vase convey beautifully the diversified urge of the creative process. They represent its infinite fulness."²⁰

The symbol, however, is of transparent meaning to an initiated eye. It will be useful here to quote further from what Prof. Agrawala observes in this connection in his article :

"The conception of the human body as the Full Vase continues in Indian religious thought to this day. We still speak of the divinity as *ghaṭa-ghaṭa-vyakta*, i.e. permeating each embodied form or *ghaṭa*. In each household on every auspicious occasion the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa is established near the doorway, and in the Maṇḍapa where the marriage ceremony is performed. In each ceremony the Ghaṭa as representing the human body, or which is the same thing as the created world, is the first to be worshipped. Verses and hymns are uttered in praise of the Ghaṭa saying that Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva reside in the bottom, belly and mouth of the Auspicious Jar."^{20a}

"Clear pure water consecrated with sacred herbs and leaves is filled and decorative patterns are made

on the body of the Maṅgala Kalaśa. Worship with flowers and saffron is offered. A burning lamp filled with *grita* is put on the lid of the Kalaśa. The Vase is placed on the ground, which is artistically decorated with architectural patterns and beautiful motifs, *Alpanā* and *Māṇḍanā*. Thus installed, the Kalaśa serves as the nucleus of the ceremony.

“It is also the symbol of fertility, filled as it is, with the fecund Waters of Life. At the time of childbirth, the mother holds a Pūrṇa Ghaṭa and walks with it to the nearest well, reservoir or pool of water to offer worship, as the latter represents the bigger source of the same fecundating Waters of creative life. At this time water is taken from the well and mingled with the water in the pitcher held by the mother—a significant symbolic ceremony denoting that the life force in the Pot is being replenished from the Pūrṇam or the Plenum of cosmic life-force outside. The human body represents its limited manifestation, whereas the life-force surrounding it is boundless and measureless.”²¹

In the *Atharvaveda* itself, the Full Vase now appears as a familiar earthen jar (*kumbha*) filled with water (signifying the principle of Soma in practice and common belief). In the sacrifice the pitcher was filled with Soma but the same in domestic worship was filled with water and the two were considered as of equal merit. It is invoked as enshrining in it all the

blessings and divine bounties. In the "Śālā Sūkta" ²², the hymn of benediction on the completion ceremony of a new house, uttered while entering and taking the formal possession of it, we have the earliest description of 'a complete picture of an Indian household, full with all blessings (*śrasti*) and felicitous fortunes (*saubhāgya*)'. The imagery is fully evolved enumerating all the traditional motifs of an Indian household marked by plenty and prosperity; by sturdy youths and beautiful maidens, their young sons and healthy cattle rich in milk²³. The specific mention in the end of the Full Vase foaming forth with streams of butter and amṛita carried in the hands of the Lady of the House, the Eternal Woman, invoked as Queen of Home and its presiding deity, takes the picture to a climax :

"O fair damsel, bring hither to us the Pūrṇa Kumbha filled with streams of molten butter, blent with nectar.

Bedew these drinkers with a draught of ambrosia. May the reward of our pious works guard this dwelling." (AV. III. 12.8)

II

Amongst the earliest depictions of the Full Vase in Indian art, at Bharhut we see it represented as the vegetating symbol of pot and foliage, either alone, or as a support to Goddess Gaja-

Full Pot in
Early Art

Lakshmī. In some cases in Sanchi reliefs, the goddess Śrī-Lakshmī is shown seated or standing on a lotus flower. And thus we find, as classified by Coomaraswamy,²⁴ the three types of the representation:

- (i) The Goddess standing or seated on a lotus,
- (ii) the same, but the lotus rises from a Pūrṇa Ghaṭa,
- (iii) the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa alone, with a mass of lotus flowers and leaves rising from it.



Fig. 1 Bharhut.

He says : “ The three types are apparently equal and synonymous symbols of abundance and it may be that the vase alone should be regarded as an

aniconic symbol of and equivalent to the Goddess herself."²⁵

This may be true, as 'the aspect of the form and its mode of occurrence in the early art seems to suggest'. But the latter view of Coomaraswamy identifying Pūrṇa Ghaṭa and Śrī-Lakshmī may only be partially true. The decorative and auspicious value of the symbol in itself was quite high and well-admitted. As such it was included in the list of eight auspicious symbols, and is seen as an emblem being held by ✓ Nāgas, river-goddesses and other divinities²⁶, and as a finial and decorative motif, etc., in the architecture of all periods.²⁷

Two of the Bharhut reliefs decorating the chamfered edges of the railing pillars between the medallions,

show the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa motif
Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at combined with lotus flowers and leaves rising from
Bharhut it. One or two pairs of

Harisa birds are shown perching on the sprays (see Pls. IV-V). The Vase of Abundance is shaped as a pot with budding belly and sloping shoulder ornamented by fillet of disks, a flower-cord (*mekhalā*) round the neck, and projecting rim (Fig. 1). Three of the other similar chamfer-reliefs represent the Goddess Śrī seated or standing on a lotus flower supported by and issuing out of the beautifully



Fig. 2

embellished Pūrṇa Ghaṭa, and she is being bathed by two elephants on either side supported similarly by lotuses, with two inverted jars held in their trunk (Pls. I-III). In such compositions we see the delightful combination of both the Goddess and the Vase, of Prosperity and Abundance.

Similar illustrations will be found repeated at many times at

Sanchi Stūpa in
Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at several varieties,²⁸

Sanchi and testify to the
high popularity of

the motif. On the Sanchi Stūpas
the motif is shown no less than
twenty-two times, with a mass

of lotus sprays and leaves ; in some cases in the
form of long rising creepers. A

few of the pleasing and typical
ones are illustrated here, in Figs.
2-4.

We could not fail here to make
specific mention of an isolated
pillar found from the Jamalpur site at Mathura,
showing Goddess Śrī Lakshmī standing on lotuses
springing from a globular pot and might be descri-



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

bed as the completest possible treatment of the auspicious motif

Śrī Lakshmī and of the "Full Jar"
Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at (Pūrṇa Ghaṭa) ^{28a}.

Mathura At the back of the
pillar there is ris-

ing lotus plant with leaves, buds and flowers, and seated on the central leaf is a pair of peacocks with pendant tails; for the association of birds in pair with the Vase and Goddess, cf. *ante* p. 11; and *The Monuments of Sanchi*, Vol. I, pl. XI.

In the making of this beautiful and auspicious figure some great master of the Mathura School combined five elements to evolve a perfect form, viz. (1) Pūrṇa Ghaṭa with overflowing lotus buds, full blossomed flowers and leaves, (2) rising lotus stalks luxuriating with buds, flowers and leaves, similar in style to a Śrī-Vṛiksha (Tree of Life) with respective motifs, (3) Devī Śrī-Lakshmī, as Goddess Padmā-Śrī standing in full stature with her feet resting on the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa

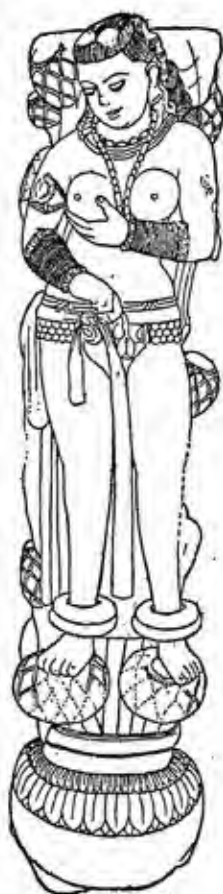


Fig. 5

and her body in the midst of a lotus grove, (4) a pair of Hamsas perched on the central lotus on the back, and (5) lastly the pose of nourishing with milk (*dugdhā-dhāriṇī*) as shown by Śrī pressing her breast with left hand, a feature taken from Bharhut.

Before considering other representations of the Brimming Jar elsewhere, the other aspect of the

Kalaśa or Pot as

Treasure Vase
in Indian Art

Treasure-contain-
er may be illustra-
ted from Indian

Art. The famous Kalpadruma²⁹ capital from Besnagar (Pl. VI), usually dated in the 3rd century B.C., is the Wishing-Tree represented by a banyan with long pendant aerial roots, from which untold wealth in the shape of square pieces of money is drooping in much quantities that all the vessels placed below are full and overflowing. We find here shown alternatively four vessels full of money and four bags fastened with a band round the neck.



Fig. 6

The open vessels are all different, a large shell, a full-blown lotus and a pot. Pl. VI illustrates the pot or *Kalasi* of treasure. The capital perhaps was dedicated to Kubera as the other two are clearly the Nidhis of him. He was truly the native god of wealth and the lord of Yakshas, who latter attending upon him were popular guardians of the Nidhis. We may here refer to the half-seen Yakshas in trees, offering pot and an object, probably illustrating the story of the Treasure, etc.³⁰, from Bharhut and Bodhgaya reliefs (Figs. 7-8). An excellent depiction of a Pūrṇa Ghaṭa



Fig. 9

overflowed with coins, comes from Tamluk (anc. Tāmralipti), and is obviously to be dated to the Śuṅga period. It is an exquisitely carved terracotta plaque, a fine piece of art, with the design of Pūrṇa Ghaṭa exuding punch-marked square coins shown in rows covering its body. Faint traces of feet are seen on its mouth suggesting a figure of Lakshmī or Vasudhārā standing over it as the Wealth-muse, pleased, upon being invoked or propitiated, to allow the flow of wealth in favour of her votaries.³¹ (Pl. XX).



Sanchi Fig. 10

Kubera or Jambhala seated on the Kalaśa-seat, is a well-known iconographic feature which represents



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 14

Amaravati



Fig. 11 Mathura



Fig. 13 Amaravati



Fig. 12 Begram

the treasure of the god.³² Cf. p. 37, for the Pot and foliage under the seat of the Buddha.

Figs. 2-4, 9-5 and Pls. VII-XIII illustrate the beautiful depictions of vegetating Full Vase, from Sanchi, Mathura, Kaushāmbī, Sarnath, Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at Amaravati, Nagarjunikonda and Other Centres Kapiśā. In the first group, Figs. 4, 9-14 and Pls. VIII-XI and XIII, we see the flowers and leaves spread and scattered over



Fig. 20

Amaravati



Fig. 21

Mathura



Fig. 22

Amaravati

the decorated pot on either side and above. Says Coomaraswamy : "As seen in outline or relief, the Pūrṇa Kalaśa is generally a globular vessel with a foot, and a constricted neck ; the body of the vessel is invariably encircled by a ribbon or other band,

tied with knots and serving the purpose of a magical 'fence' (see J. A. O. S., Vol. 48, p. 273); from the mouth there arises a spray or bunch of lotus flowers

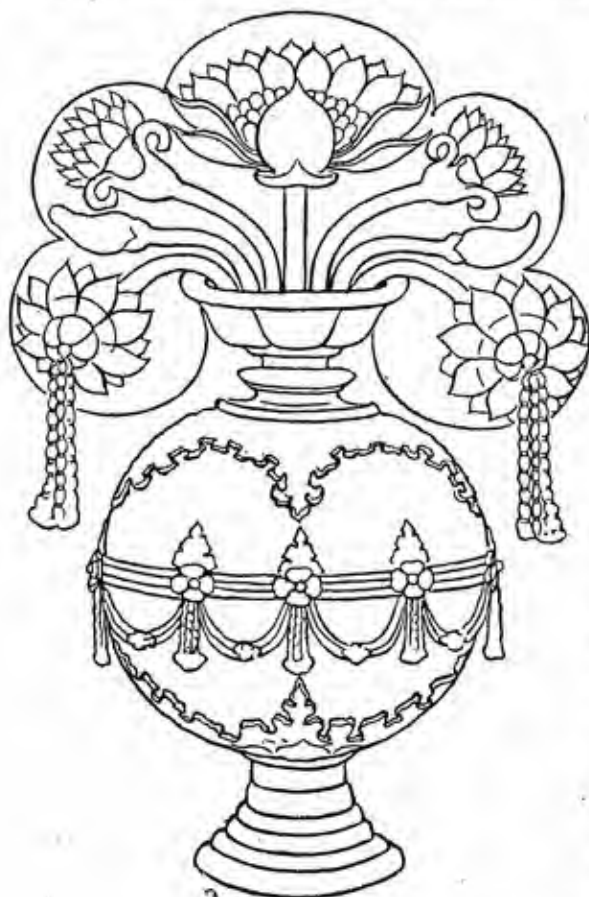


Fig. 15 Java



Fig. 16
Anuradhapur

or leaves hang over symmetrically on each side of the mouth, like the volutes of a palmette”.

But the other decorative variety, represented by Figs. 3, 6 shows the foliage extended upwards straight dissolved in arabasque rising from the crock. In Figs. 2-3 and Pl. VII it will be seen that vase and vine are combined either vertically or horizontally and used as creeper motif. As Coomaraswamy has observed : “very commonly and especially when narrow vertical



Fig. 17
Anuradhapur, Ceylon



Fig. 18
Sinhalese embroidery

spaces are available for the reception of symbolic ornament, the vegetative element is extended upwards to a considerable height, either as a conventional candelabra-like tree, or as a long spray of lotus, bearing

flowers and leaves, and enclosing or framing birds and beasts in convolutions".³³ (See Fig. 23). These may be further represented here from later art of India and Indonesia, by Figs. 15-18 and Pls. XXXI-II.



Fig. 19 Hampi

But as a design the Pūrṇa Ghāṭa saturated Indian art and architecture in several other forms and ways, and as the same authority remarked :

Pot and Foliage
Capital and
Base

“ As an integral architectural motif it occurs in rich and varied forms as an essential part, generally the capital or the sub-capital, of monolithic or

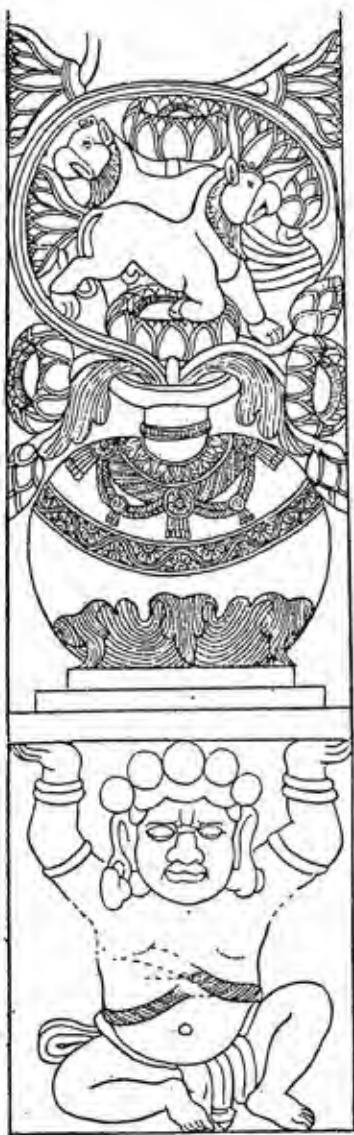


Fig.23 Amaravati



Fig 24.

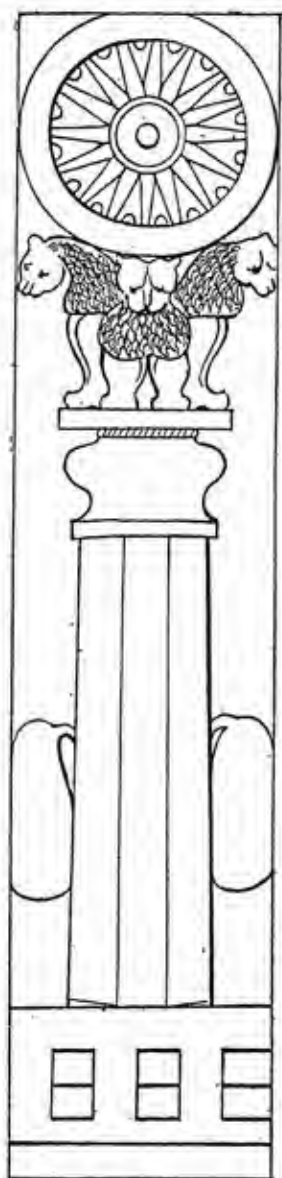


Fig. 25



Fig. 26

structural columns, or as the support of a pilaster. It constitutes the well-known pot and foliage capital of medieval Indian architecture, a form that has generally

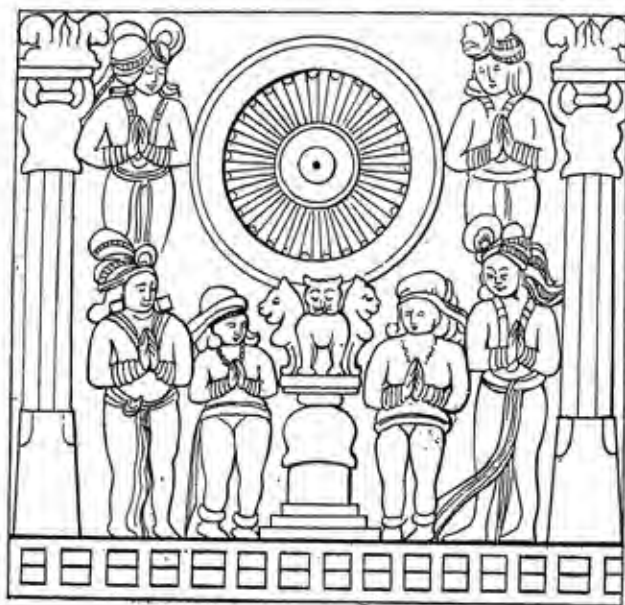


Fig. 27 Sanchi

been regarded as a development from the old "bell" capital, but while it is possible that the capital as such has originated in this way, this must not be thought of an origin of the motif itself, which is already fully developed in Śuṅga art".³⁴

The so-called "bell-capital" of the Mauryan columns is nothing but a conventionalised form of Pot-and-Foliage, and the theory that it had evolved

from the practice of decorating posts and sacrificial stakes with Ghata, has recently been propounded afresh by Prof. Agrawala. The value of the theory is further enhanced and is almost made, in his words,

Fig. 29

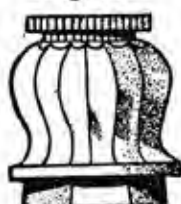


Fig. 28



Fig. 30



Fig.
31

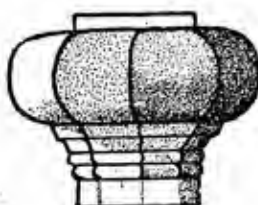


Fig.
32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

After Combaz, *op. cit.*, pl. III.

'certain by the form of the motif as interpreted during Suñgan times on the railing pillars found at Sarnath',

where the artists had represented and explained in relief the various component parts of the Aśokan lion-capital, the favourite and glorious emblem on the spot (Pl. XXI). That is also repeated so many times elsewhere in art and the composition of the pot on top (and also at base) is emphasised in these representations. For

Fig. 35



Fig. 36

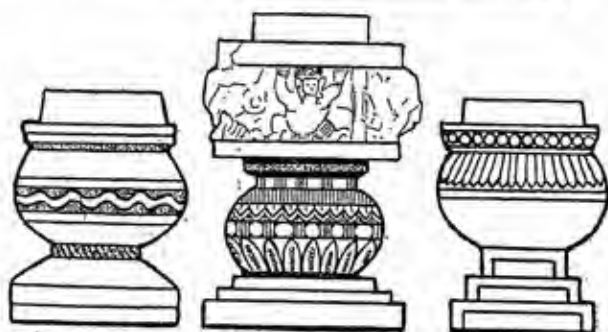


Fig. 37

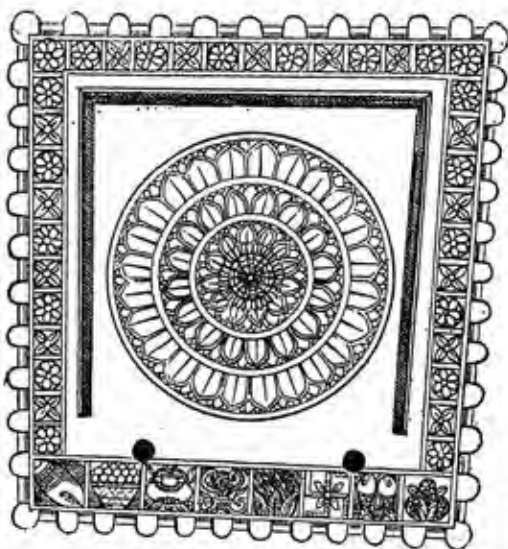
Fig. 39

Fig. 38

a further elaboration readers are referred to the informative treatise *Chakradhvaja* by Prof. Agrawala on the problem of the origins of different component members of the Mauryan Pillars³⁵. Here for our purpose, only a few illustrations may be given as

Pl. XXI from
Sarnath, Figs.
25 and 27
from Sanchi,
Pl. XXII and
Fig. 40 from
Mathura and
Fig. 26 from
Amaravati, and
Fig. 19 from
Hazāra Rama-
chandra tem-
ple, Hampi.

For the
Ghaṭa motif
as an architec-
tural part of
a pillar or
pilaster instan-
ces are many
and quite
recognisable.
A few assem-
bled here as
typical will be
seen in Figs.
28-34, as ca-
pital, and 35-



Figs. 40-41 Mathura

39, as basement (taken from Combaz, Pl. XII). See also Fig. 39 x from Kanheri chaitya hall.

The Pūrṇa Ghaṭa motif was also adopted to decorate the finial of a Hindu temple, and it is actually called *kalāśa* placed on the *āmalaka śilā*.

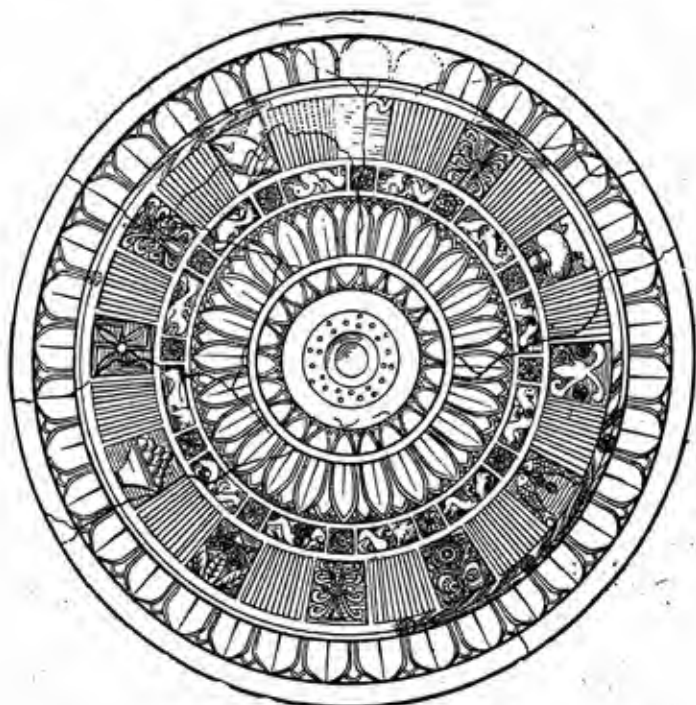


Fig. 42 Mathura

In some cases of the relief depictions an arch is shown springing out from a pair of such pots put

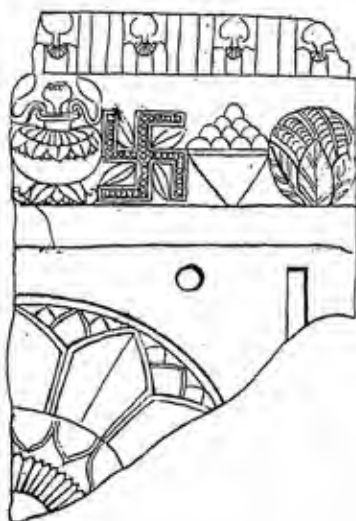


Fig. 43

either side, as for example in Amaravati, Gandhara and Borobudur.³⁶

In Jaina art the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa is one of the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa in Auspicious Jaina Art Symbols, at Mathura (Pl. XIII), reckoned as eight Ashta-maṅgala Chihnas³⁷, Figs. 40-43. It is also one of the fourteen

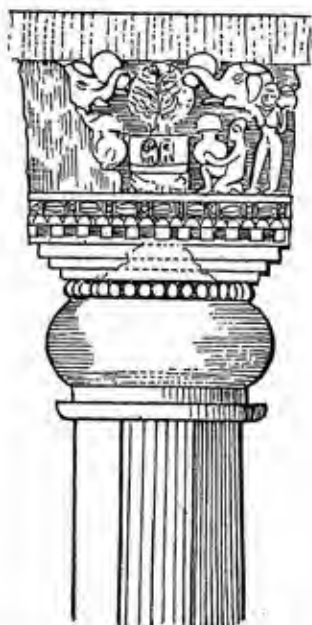


Fig. 39x



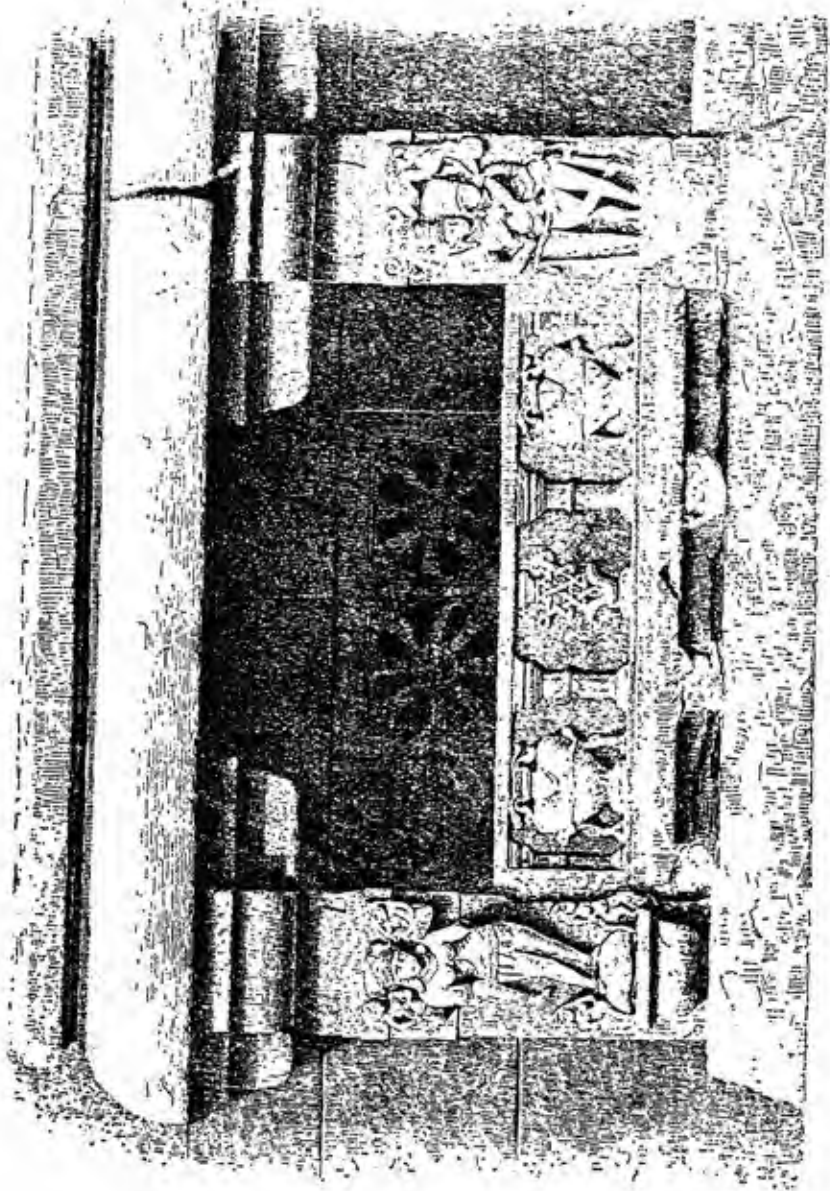


Fig. 45 Lad Khan Temple, Aihole.

lucky dreams seen by Queen Trisālā, which are described in detail in Jaina texts³⁸, and represented in stone reliefs, on door-lintels of Jaina shrines, and in Jaina miniatures. (See Pls. XXXIII-XXXV and Fig. 44).

It was the sacred and auspicious symbol during all periods and among all sects, and was universally employed in embellishing houses, shrines, monuments and cities. The charming conception of a house beautified with Full Vase, *Pūṇyaghaṭa-paṭimaṇḍita ghara*, is already made familiar in the Buddhist literature³⁹. Bāṇa (*Harshacharita*, VII, 227) says of "a golden vessel adorned with sprays", set on the altar of a Brahmanical temple. As auspicious and inviting symbol of plenty, the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa placed on either side of the entrance doorway is also alluded to by Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvamśa*⁴⁰.

A pair of vessels may be seen placed flanking the entrance of the Deogarh shrine⁴¹, where they are supported on the head of a Yaksha. On the facade of the front porch of the Lad Khan temple (Fig. 45) a pair of such Full Vases is shown and also in other Chalukyan temples⁴². Cf. also a Viragal relief (a memorial or 'Hero-Stone') from Mantur, found in a field, showing the feature⁴³.

An example may be cited for the motif before the cave-shrine at Junagarh⁴⁴. Besides, they Pūrṇa Ghaṭa in are commonly placed flanking the Stūpas Stūpa entrances, as we see on Amara-vati and Nagarjunikonda Stūpapāṭa reliefs, Pls. XVII-VIII⁴⁵. On some of the Stūpapāṭas showing elaborate details of the extinct Stūpas at Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, the beautiful decoration of a frieze of Pūrṇaghaṭas in a continuous row (*pūrṇaghaṭapaṅkti*) is carved with other bands of festoon, animal and triratna, etc.; see Pl. XV. A particularly happy representation of the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa with a temple may be seen on a Viragal Stone (or Hero Stone) from Mantur.

An exquisitely carved marble from Nagarjunikonda⁴⁶ shows on one slab three friezes of triratnas, of Pūrṇaghaṭas, and of young men carrying a heavy garland⁴⁷. (See Pl. XVI). It is probable that the pūrṇaghaṭa slabs showing the most delightful and pleasing representations of the Full Vase formed part of such actual Pūrṇa Ghaṭa friezes on the body of the domical curve of Stūpa, accompanied by some others⁴⁸. See Pls. IX-X and VIII. The appropriate names for such panels carved with Pūrṇa Ghaṭa designs are supplied by the short labels to be found on some of them, viz. *Kalasapāṭa*, and *Pūrṇaghaṭapāṭa*⁴⁹. They must have been considered sacred and no doubt a thing of real beauty in themselves.

As such it is treated on numerous seals and also coins from the Gupta period which provide a good many conventionalised illustrations of the motif (see Pl. XIV). The row of Pūrṇa Ghaṭas decorated various places and spots of importance and sanctity, is fully supported by the *Kāliṅga Bodhi Jātaka* (479). There was installed a line of eight hundred Full Vases, made of silver and gold, filled with scented water, and covered with lotus flowers, round the Bodhi Tree⁵⁰.

In the *Mañimekhalai*, Bk. I, on some particular festive occasion, order was given to decorate the city, the great royal roads, and the halls of faultless learning; to put in their proper places full jars, seed-vessels with budding sprouts, and statues holding lamps⁵¹. As the procession of the relic-car came out, the *Mahāvamsa* narrates, a thousand beautiful women from the city with adornment of fair Full Vessels (*suppuṇṇa ghaṭabbhūsāyo*) surrounded it⁵². The woman with a Full Vase, is mentioned under the name, *Pūrṇa-Kumbha-Kanyā*, as one of the auspicious symbols in the Lumbinī procession of Queen Māyā Devī⁵³; for the earliest allusion to the motif, *ante* 9. These *Pūrṇa-Kumbha Kanyā* may be illustrated from Indian art in a sculptured relief at Amaravati, identified by Coomaraswamy as *Nadī Devatās*⁵⁴, and also Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, Pl. XCIV, 3 and 4, showing both female and male figures holding

Pūrṇa Ghaṭas engaged worshipping the Bodhi Tree.



Fig 46 Ellora

Coomaraswamy observed that the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa was used in the worship of deities⁵⁵. For this also.

the above illustrations from Amaravati are no less significant. To them we add reliefs from Amaravati⁵⁶, Udayagiri⁵⁷, Ellora and Borobodur⁵⁸. (See



Fig. 47 Borobodur, Java

Figs. 46-7). The fact that the Pūrṇa Ghata has been regarded as the worshipful motif and employed invariably through the ages, need not be much emphasised here, to which numerous references could be collected from literature throughout. There

is the universal Indian custom of offering a full vessel to an honoured deity or guest in his worship or in his reception. Even today it is the first object to be consecrated in religious and domestic rituals and is the traditional emblem of sanctity and votive beauty.

As part of the iconographic scheme the Full Vase in its various forms will be seen connected with Śrī-Lakshmi, river goddesses (Pls. XXVII-III and the Frontispiece), Kubera, his consort Bhadrā another form of Lakshmi, Varuṇa (Fig. 48), Nāgas (Fig. 49) and other divinities.

But it should be "clearly distinguished from the plain jars sometimes carried by the early undiffer-



Fig. 48 Badami

entiated river goddesses and also from the *Amṛita* phial borne by Indra and some other deities though these similar vessels likewise are of necessity thought of as inexhaustible. It will be found at once that almost every important deity is said, in one place

or another, to possess a wish-granting talisman, either an inexhaustible bowl or productive jewel, or a tree of paradise that yield all kinds of treasures,



Fig. 49

or a wishing cow, or some other treasure. ...We have further the general and very significant fact of the drink or food of the gods (*soma*, *amṛita* etc.) always conceived as contained in or drunk from a special vessel, e.g. the cup fashioned for the gods by Tvaṣṭri, when the *soma* is represented in art, it is as a full vessel (*pūrṇaḡhāṭa*) and precisely such as a full or brimming vessel (*pūrṇaḡhāṭa*) is the commonest of all Indian symbols of plenty, and also Anuradhapur a symbol of the waters in the plant style, is constantly represented as a source of vegetation."⁵⁹ Its "form is essentially that of a flower vase, combining a never failing source of water with an ever-living vegetation or tree of life. The type is of the widest distribution in later art, and it can always be identified by the symmetrically placed lateral overfalling leaves or flowers."⁶⁰

In some cases, curiously enough, the typical Pūrṇa Ghāṭa is found installed under the seat of deities, like Kubera (*ante* 16); and the Buddha.⁶¹ In the latter example it may have represented only the indicative sign of the worship by votaries, or

did have any iconographical significance, is not certain. Coomaraswamy interpreted some of the Śuṅga bas-relief representations of the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa alone, as standing for the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī, but he was fully aware of the difficulty that no positive evidence could be adduced for it.

Foucher took it to be symbolic of the Nativity of Buddha; this theory is usually not given much recognition by scholars and does not hold good on obvious grounds. On several of the Borobodur panels the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa appears as framed inside a niche and being worshipped by the people. All probability is there in favour that the Full Vase represented symbolically the Buddha himself to whom such panels were dedicated.⁶²

The Pūrṇa Ghaṭa is such a typical and beautiful motif as any could be. It is a perfect and most fascinating motif of Indian art. It sets a sample of Indian genius in formulating a meaningful symbol, much simple, readily available in every household, yet surcharged with high symbolism, an accepted and understood exemplar of the fulness of Eternal Divine on the one hand and the human body on the other. It stands for beauty, art and life.



I



II



III



IV



V



VII



VI



VIII



XII



XIII

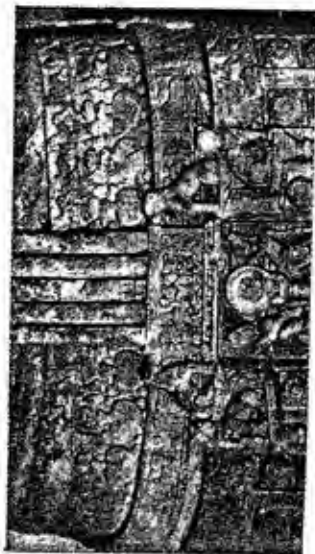


IX



X

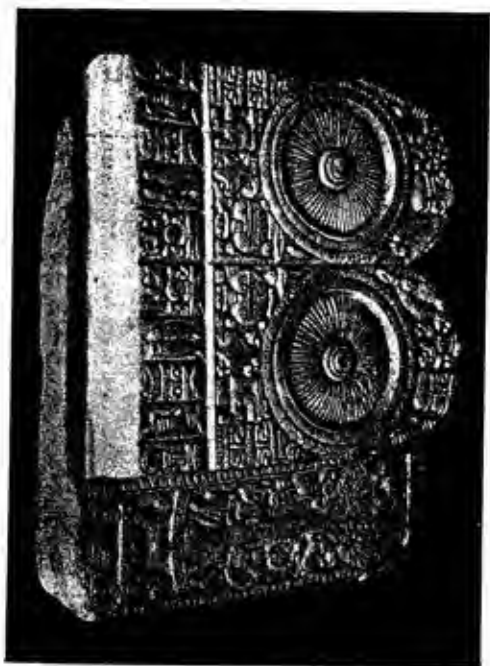




XV



IXX



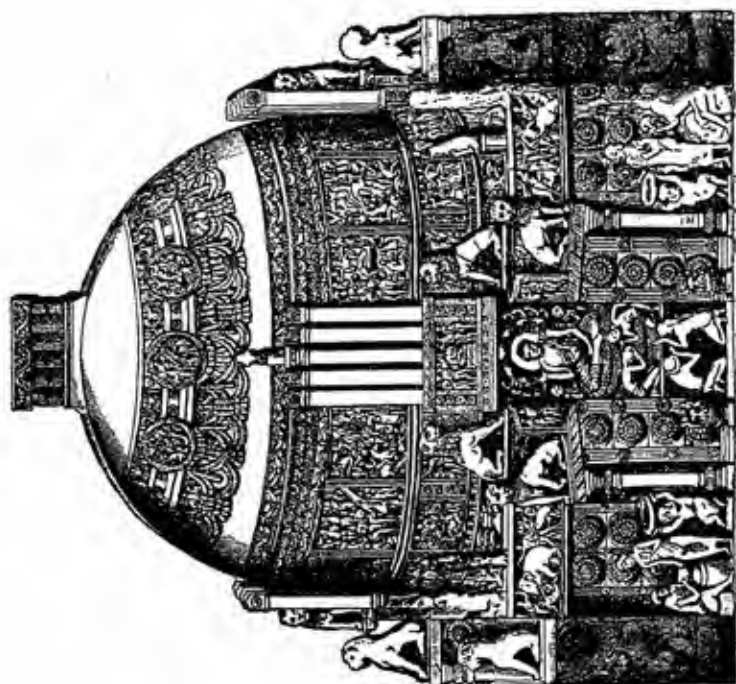
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XVIII



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XVII





XXX



XXXI



XXI



XXII



XXIX



XXX



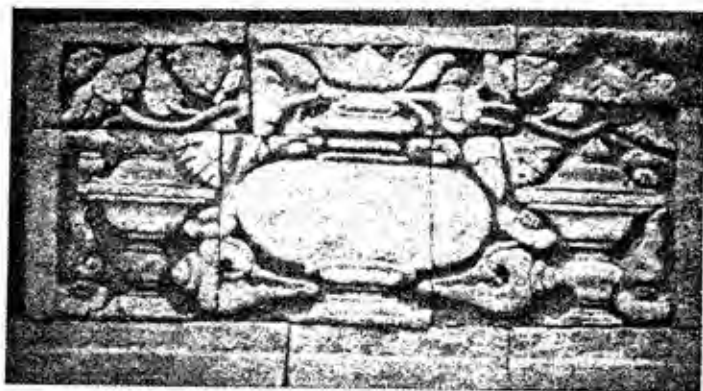
XXXI



XXIII



XXIV



XXXII



XXVII



XXVIII

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Appendix I

[From Coomaraswamy, *Yakshas*, Pt. II, pp. 63-4]

“ Since we cannot expect to recover many actual documents of pre-Mauryan art in impermanent material, particularly wood, it will be pertinent to call attention to the Mesopotamian analogy of the



Fig. 51

Flowing vase, which gradually developed into a vase of vegetation; for a similar evolution may have taken place in India. In the representations of this “ merveilleux symbole qui était comme le *Saint-Graal* de l'épopée chaldéenne,” to quote the words of one of the greatest scholars of Sumerian antiquities, there can be recognised an “ evolutionary” and more or less chronological sequence of types. At first there are plain globular vases, held by standing or seated personages, one hand below, the other on the vase (Heuzey, *loc. cit.*, pl. V). Then comes

the typical and very beautiful form, that of a vase

from which spring two undulating streams of water, to right and left; these are held by male or female genii of the waters, represented in sculpture or metal-work, e.g., the beaker of Gudea¹, or by a divinity represented on seal cylinders, e.g., Heuzey, *loc. cit.*, p. 41, and Ward, *Seal cylinders*, Nos. 286, 650,

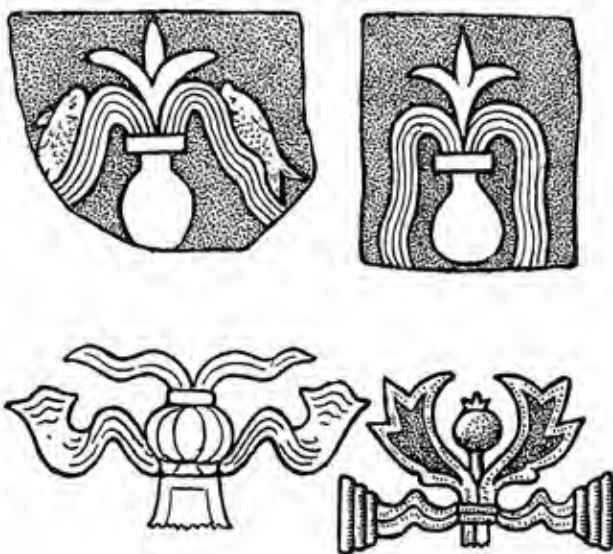


Fig. 52-5

After Combaz, *L'Inde et l'Orient classique*, Vol. II. 121. From Tello, Sceau de Goudea, Bamiyan and Kish respectively.

etc., in some cases numbers of such flowing vases may be arranged symmetrically to form an all-over

¹ Unger, No. 47.

design (Fig. 50). Occasionally a small vegetative sprout is shown between the two rising streams, and this later develops into an ear of corn. Sometimes four streams are represented; very often accompanied by fish, perhaps as a symbol of Ishtar, or simply to emphasise the sense of water. Finally we get a vase of a somewhat different shape, having a tall central sprout and two lateral volutes, which seem to represent the original streams of water (Ward, No. 203; here Fig. 51); these vases are offerings set before a deity (Heuzey, *p.* 163; Unger, No. 59, Ward, Nos. 421, 1235). We thus arrive at a form at least analogous to the Indian, inasmuch as it is a vase of vegetation, with symmetrical over-falling volute-like elements on either side; and it may be suggested that perhaps the Indian form has been developed from an older type of actually flowing vase, analogous to that of the early Chaldean art."

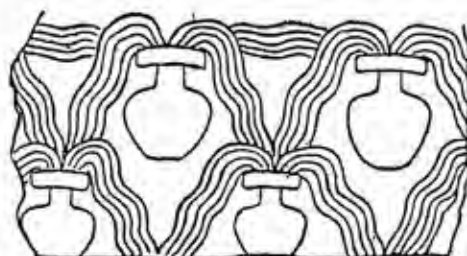


Fig. 50

List of Half-tone Plates

- I-V. From Bharhut Railing-pillars. C. 150 B. C. Photo :
ASI.
 - VI. Kalpadruma Capital, from Besnagar; now Indian
Museum, Calcutta. 3rd cent. B. C. ASI.
 - VII. Carved pillar from Kaushambi. From *Indian
Archaeology—a review*, 1956-7, pl. XXXVIIIa.
1st cent. B. C.
 - VIII. Amaravati Stūpa. Carved panel. 2nd cent. B. C.
ASI.
 - IX-X. Amaravati marbles. 3rd cent. In the collection
of R. B. S. T. Srinivasagopalachariar. Reproduced
here from *Bhārata Kaumudī*, figs. 1 and 2 facing p.
954, accompanying Sivaramamurti's article. They
show Śaṅkha and Padma *nidhis* on a Full Vase, res-
pectively.
 - XI. Begram ivory. From Hakin. 2nd cent. A.D.
 - XII. Nagarjunikonda Stūpa. Andhra-Ikshvaku period.
ASI.
 - XIII. Carved roundel. From Mathura, now Boston
Museum. Courtesy : Boston M.
 - XIV. Gupta coin of Chandragupta II. Reverse. Allan,
p. lxxxviii (Intro.), on pl. XI 23, described on p. 60.
Courtesy : British M.
- For seals showing Pūrṇa Ghaṭas, from Basarh—

- ASI-AR. 1903-4, pls. XLI, 20, 21, 25, 33, XLII and XL, 5.
- XV-VI. From Nagarjunikonda. ASI.
- XVII. From Amaravati. ASI.
- XVIII. From Nagarjunikonda. ASI.
- XIX. Buddha-pada. From Nagarjunikonda. ASI.
- XX. Terracotta plaque from Tamluk. 2nd-1st cent. B.C. ASI.
- XXI. Sarnath. 1st cent. B.C. ASI.
- XXII. From a relief, Mathura. ASI.
- XXIII. Indra Sabhā. Ellora. 8th cent. India Office Photograph, here reproduced from *Yakshas*, pl. 17.
- XXIV. Verandah of Cave XXIV. Ajanta. Courtesy : Same.
- XXV-VI. Mathura.
- XXVII-VIII. Life-sized terracotta goddesses. Gaṅgā and Yamunā. From Śiva temple, Ahichchhatra. Late Gupta period. ASI.
- XXIX. Goddess, Kulu. In a temple dated 1428 A.D. From *Yakshas*, pl. 23.
- XXX. A Hero Stone or Viragal, Mantur. From Cousens, *Chalukyan Temples*, pl. CLIV.
- XXXI. Tracery window, South India. From *Yakshas*, pl. 17. 18th cent.
- XXXII. Carved panel, Chandi Sewu, Java. From Coom., *Yakshas*, pl. 17. Early 9th cent.
- XXXIII-V. Jaina Miniatures. Showing the 14 Dreams of Triśalā, and Pūrṇa Ghaṭas used as decorative design. C. fifteenth century. ASI.

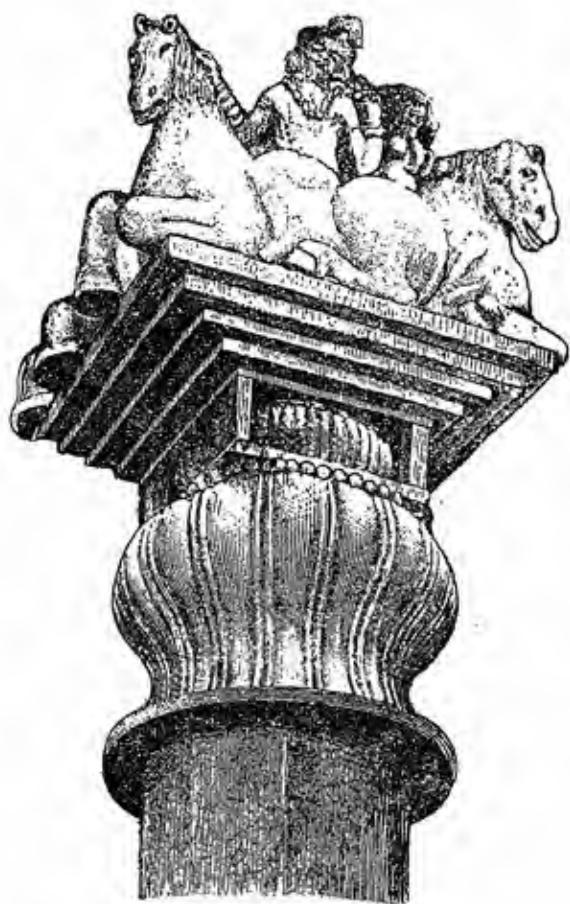
NOTES

- 1 These terms can be, and have been translated into English in several ways, namely : the Full Vase, Full Jar, Full Pot, Brimming Jar, Vase of Plenty, or the Plentiful Vessel etc. In its Indian names, the word *Pūrṇa* denotes fulness, plenum, abundance or plenty; and the second part of the compound is the word for vessel or jar.
- 2 See Agrawala, V. S., "*Pūrṇa Kalāśa*", *Roopa Lekha*, XXII, No. 1, p. 22.
- 3 Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Pt. II, p. 61.
- 4 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, p. 22; *Studies in Indian Art*, Art. p. 43.
- 5 Agrawala, "*Pūrṇa Kumbha or the Full Vase*" JUPHS. Vol. XVII, Pt. 1, pp. 1-2. See also *Rigveda Translations* by Griffith and Wilson.
- 6 See *Vedic Index*, II, pp. 476-7.
- 7 "Kosha, Sadhastha, Vana, Droṇa are all terms used for Soma vessels," *Vedic Index*, II, pp. 476-7. Also for *kalāśa* in this context, *Rigveda*, IX. 60. 3; 75.3; 81.2; 86.16; 19. 22; 97.22; etc. Hymn IX. 96 uses Droṇa, Chamū, Kosha for Soma jar.
8. Agrawala, JUPHS. XVII, Pt. 1, p. 2.
- 9 RV. IV. 27.5.
- 10 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, p. 2.
- 11 *Dhishanā*, RV. I. 96.1; I. 102.1, 7 etc.; *Dhishanānām*, RV. V. 69.2.

- 12 Johannsen, K. F., *Über die altindische Göttin Dhiṣaṇā...*, pp. 26-28.
- 13 Of RV. IX. 62. The actual word used in the 19th verse for "all glories" is *Vitvā śriyaḥ* :
Āvīṣaṇ Kalāśam suto vitvā arshannabhi śriyaḥ.
 We have given above only relevant portions, based on Griffith's *Translation*, modified here and there.
- 14 Agrawala, *Roopa Lekha*, XXII, No. 1, p. 23.
- 15 Coomaraswamy, *loc. cit.*, pp. 62-3.
- 16 VS. 19.87.
- 17 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, pp. 23-4.
- 18 AV. XIX. 53.3.
- 19 *Pūrṇaḥ kumbho' adbhikāla ābita stam vai patyāmo babudhā na suntam.*
- 20 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, pp. 23-4.
- 20a *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 AV. III. 12.
- 23 See also AV. XI. 8.24, for a like picture of an Indian Household or the human body wherein 'Enjoyments, pleasures and delights, gladness and rapturous ecstasies;
 Laughter and merriment, dance and play have come to reside'.
- 24 *Yakshas*, II, p. 61; "Śrī-Lakshmi", *Eastern Art*, I (3), p. 183.
- 25 *Yakshas*, II, p. 61.
- 26 *Infra*, 36-7.
- 27 Coomaraswamy, "Śrī-Lakshmi", *Eastern Art*, I (3), p. 183.

- 28 For Abhisheka Lakshmī at Sanchi, see Marshall, *Monuments of Sanchi*, pls. 11, 24, 25, 30, 41, 44, 56, 87, 88, 90, 98, 102. But only in two cases the Ghaṭa is shown under the Goddess; which references are indicated above by italics.
- 28a Coomaraswamy, *loc. cit.*; also HIIA., p. 65.
- 29 Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, II, p. 72; Cunningham, *Archaeological Reports*, Part I.
- 30 *Dhammapada*, Aṭṭhakathā, I, 204, see Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, I, 274.
- 31 Ramachandran, T. N., "Tamruk," *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XIV, 3, pp. 232-4.
- 32 Cf. Ramachandran, *Goli Stūpa*, pl. vi (2); Marshall, MOS., pl. 126 (h); Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, pl. XLVII(2).
- 33 *Yakṣas*, II, p. 62.
- 34 *Ibid.* p. 63.
- 35 Agrawala, *Chakradhvaja—the Wheel-Flag of India*.
- 36 Ananta Cave, Orissa, Bacchofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, pl. 133; Ingholt, *Gandharan Art in Pakistan*, Figs. 78, 407; *Borobudur*, II, XV, 30.
- 37 Shah, U.P., *Studies in Jaina Art*, 'Ashtamaṅgala', pp. 109-112;
- 38 *Ibid.*, "Auspicious Dreams", pp. 105-8; *Yakṣas*, II, p. 61.
- 39 *Dhammapada*, Aṭṭhakathā, I. 147 Agrawala, JUPHS. XVII, Pt. I, p. 4.
- 40 Sivatatamamurti, *Mirrors Of Indian Culture*, p. 4.
- 41 Vats, Gupta Temple at Deogath, pl. IX.
- 42 Cousens, *Chalukyan Temples*, pl. XIV.

- 43 *Chalukyan Temples*, pls. CLIV-V.
 - 44 Burgess, *Report on the Antiquities of Kathiawar and Kachh*, 1874-5, pl. XVII.
 - 45 Longhurst, *Nagarjunikonda Stūpas*, pl. XI b. c. d. See also Ramachandran, *Nagarjunikonda*.
 - 46 Longhurst, *loc. cit.*, pl. XIV, d. Here Pl. XVI.
 - 47 AR-ASI, 1930-4, pl. XXXIX e. See Barret, *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum*, p. 38. Fn. 56.
 - 48 *Ibid.* pl. XXXI, c.
 - 49 Agrawala, *Indian Art*, p. 285.
 - 50 *Rōjā atīṣṭasatamatte suvaṇṇarājatagaṭe gandhodakapūre nīluppala-batṭhakaḍḍipāṭimaṇḍite mahābodhiṃ pariṅkeḥipitvā puṇyagaṭa-pantiṃ nāma thāpāpesi*, Fausboell, *Jātakas*, IV, p. 229.
 - 51 *Yakṣas*, II, p. 61, Fn. 2.
 - 52 XXXI. 40.
 - 53 *Lalita Vistara*, Vaidya ed., p. 71.
 - 54 *Yakṣas*, II, pl. 19, 2; Barret, *loc. cit.*, pl. XXV.
 - 55 *Yakṣas*, p. 62.
 - 56 *Ibid.*, pl. 26(2).
 - 57 Agrawala, *Gupta Art*, pl. V, Fig. 7.
 - 58 *Borobudur*, II, XXVI (51), XXXVIII (76), XXXIX (76) in worship; see Fig. 47; for reception of guest, IV (B. VIII).
 - 59 *Yakṣas*, II, p. 40.
 - 60 *Ibid.*
 - 61 Ingholt, *loc. cit.*, pls. XV (1), XXIV (2).
 - 62 *Borobudur*, II, XXXI (62); III, XVII (35-36); IV (B), XVI (74).
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